

When a woman's life was the pits

SURVIVING Wigan pit brow lasses are to bring one of the most gruelling jobs imaginable back to life in a major radio documentary.

Their stories will combine with archive material for a special BBC Radio Four programme on Saturday.

Journalists have spent the last six months compiling interviews for the hour long programme, *Women In The Pits*, which will be the most detailed broadcast study yet of the Wigan coalfield and the people who worked in it.

Ashton author Ian Winstanley, who has written six books about the Wigan coalfield and the disasters which befell it, acted as a consultant and is also interviewed walking around the site of the former Lime Pit coal screens in Haydock.

Many of the relatives of the Wigan pit brow lasses included in the programme came forward after an appeal published in the Wigan press.

The last pit brow lasses – whose job involved picking stones and shale from the coal on the screen before washing –

worked in Wigan as late as the early 1960s.

Ian, whose web site, Coalmining History Resource Centre, is now a standard point of reference for teachers and historians, added: "I've been lucky enough to be sent a copy of the programme and Wiganers will be delighted with the finished result, which is very impressive."

"At least three quarters of the hour-long programme concentrates on the Wigan coalfield and a number of named Wigan pits.

"It combines a lot of archive material with interviews recorded just weeks ago."

Ian added that, after consideration, the producers had decided to stick solely to the story of the gruelling lifestyle of pit brow lasses and not to include the role of the "pit camp women" in steadfastly opposing closures during the 1985 national pit strike.

Part of the archive hour series, the programme will be broadcast at 8pm.



HARD TIMES: Pit brow lasses at work in their gruelling job